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Journal Articles: A Second Look at *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum*, by Elizabeth Vallance.

As the title suggests, "A Second Look," is a re-examination of a five-part model that Vallance and Eisner introduced in 1973 to see which parts still hold true and which have faded.

Vallance also appends two additional "parts" to curriculum model.

Fortunately for me Vallance spent the first half of this article reviewing as well as re-examining the tenants of the original article. Nonetheless, not having read the original piece I had some difficulty understanding the nuances that she implied by her use of the words "curriculum discourse" and "conception". She does say on the first page:

The five conceptions are discrete units, mutually exclusive choices in their purest use, options to be assessed and combined in a looser application. They are subsets of the field of curriculum studies, regions within that larger territory. As such they function as a map, describing the constitute regions while stopping short of offering guidebook instructions on how to move from one to another

What? Is this the same as asking: "What is the purpose of education?" It was not a concept that I felt particularly comfortable with.

As she went through her review on how some views have flourished ("Academic Rationalism") and others diminished ("self-actualization") I couldn't help but wonder why these views had to be mutually exclusive. In fact in the end her final view that she wanted to append to the preceding six was a encompassed the

I think it's like whole language and phonics. You can't combine them or use one on one day and the other the next day because they are completely different theories on what reading is and how to teach it

I think the conceptions describe different theories, or paradigms regarding the design of curriculum.

best parts of the six because its focus shifted from the "curriculum" proper to the teacher and how the teacher taught.

Rather than talking about technology, or academic rationalism or even undefined self-actualization, I am so much more comfortable talking about education and therefore curriculum in terms of the defined "purpose" behind the educational enterprise.

*I guess you'll have to be more selective w/ the journal articles.
Try The Reading Teacher and Language Arts.*

*Joe -
he may need to
get together to discuss
your progress in the course.
You have turned in 5
journal articles at this
point. However, you
should have 9 in at
this point. Should
we talk??*

Elizabeth Vallance

A Second Look at Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum

A dozen years have passed since *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum* (Eisner & Vallance, 1973) was published. Times have changed and the assumptions Americans bring to schooling have shifted. As its co-editor, I've come to appreciate both its special value and its time-bound limitations. It demands a second look, and I shall approach my own conception of the curriculum by way of a critical study of the model we presented there in 1973.

In addition to a brief review and critique of the model, this article suggests some possible modifications and concludes with comments on the conception of curriculum that guides much thinking today. The comments offered are my own; I do not claim to speak for my co-editor, though I shall necessarily refer to concepts we jointly developed.

Five Conceptions of Curriculum

The five-part model outlined in *Conflicting Conceptions* emerged in the early 1970s, the lone survivor of many models considered and rejected at the time as being insufficiently broad, inclusive, illuminative, or representative. Other contenders included simple dichotomies, a matrix or two, at least one continuum, and an assortment of other models made up of independent discrete elements. Our task was to characterize the nature of current curriculum discourse and to identify the major themes governing it. Much curriculum discourse at the practical level seemed to lack a common ground, with conversants approaching allegedly shared problems

from quite different sets of definitions and assumptions.

The "conflicting conceptions" emerging from research reflected the special perspective that publishing curriculum theorists brought to the problem. A model drawn from comments of classroom teachers only, or of school board members, or of parents and/or students, might have been different. Nonetheless, the five-part model that emerged from the journals was clear, it offered categories that were mutually exclusive to some degree, and the five concepts seemed to cover the options open to curriculum discourse at the time.

The five conflicting conceptions are: (a) curriculum-making as a *technological* problem; (b) the curriculum as a means of developing *cognitive* processes in children; (c) the curriculum as a means of enabling students to reach their full *self-actualized* potential; (d) a *social-reconstructionist* view of the curriculum as the means for initiating social reform; and (e) the *academic-rationalist* view of the curriculum as the vehicle for the transmission of civilization's intellectual heritage. The five conceptions are discrete units, mutually exclusive choices in their purest use, options to be assessed and combined in a looser application. They are subsets of the field of curriculum studies, regions within that larger territory. As such they function as a map, describing the constituent regions while stopping short of offering guidebook instructions on how to move from one to another.

The static, descriptive nature of the model has numerous strengths as a guide to curriculum dis-

course and research. Because it does not describe a hierarchy of values or a sequence of prescriptive steps, it opens a wide variety of research questions. It offers no particular hypotheses or rules that demand testing or disproving, and thus is not particularly susceptible to rejection. It can be overlaid on other models of curriculum thinking.

Most intriguing to curriculum theorists eager to impose further order on relatively loose systems, the five categories can be reorganized in several different ways. They can be arranged along a continuum, for example, with the measurableness and precision of the technological perspective at one end and the open-ended goals of the self-actualizing perspective on the other, although the relative positions of the remaining three conceptions are not immediately obvious.

Similarly, it can be useful to dichotomize the five conceptions between those largely concerned with the individual child's capabilities (self-actualizing and cognitive process) and those largely concerned with the social impact of schooling (social reconstructionism, the cultural-transmission value of academic rationalism, and some readings of the technological perspective). Any of these approaches might prove useful in illuminating curriculum discourse and in further revealing the different assumptions and practical implications of each of the five conceptions.

More relevant is simply the question of whether this five-part model in fact describes the options available to practical curriculum discourse today. I must also ask whether the model accounts for the conception of curriculum that I now hold. My answer to both questions is no, but in the most positive sense: The gaps now apparent in this system suggest some intriguing openings for a fruitful revision of the model. How this model should be reshaped would depend on two things: (a) the directions that curriculum discourse in the public forum has taken in the intervening years and (b) my own conception of the chief curriculum problems facing educators.

A Critique and Reinterpretation

Four of the five conceptions refer explicitly to the ultimate purposes of schooling that may be held by participants in any conversation about curriculum. The cognitive-process orientation sees the development of intellectual skills as the chief purpose of schooling—the development of powers of reasoning, analysis, criticism, problem solving, judgment, etc.—with specific subject areas and content as the vehicles of development. Academic ration-

alism is nearly the opposite, assigning mastery of the knowledge accrued through intellectual tradition and the transmission of culture to each generation as the chief function of education.

Social reconstructionism (in its more aggressive form) asks that the curriculum be the means by which students are empowered to criticize and improve on society. In its more conservative form it seeks to maintain existing social patterns. The self-actualizing perspective sees the purpose of schooling to be the full development of each child's potential, with the curriculum responsible for fostering the child's identity.

All four of these conceptions reflect a concern with the goals of education, though they turn to different sources for guidance. The academic rationalist's argument particularly stems from Alfred North Whitehead's (1929) question, "What knowledge is of most worth?" but each of the four taken together demands that we ask what knowledge is most worth teaching, what intellectual skills should be taught in the process, the uses to which they will be applied, and whether that knowledge and those skills are best suited to each child's interests and unique identities.

The anomaly within the five-part model has always been the "technological" conception, for it is concerned not with purpose but with means. More than any of the other four, it claims to be value-neutral, seeking instructional systems of curriculum-development technologies that can be applied to any content and adapted to any purposes. Overtly concerned not with questions of value but with questions of efficacy and efficiency, the technological orientation seeks to develop intellectual skills in curriculum practitioners, teachers, and educational policy analysts that allow for the full understanding of an effective development of education systems. In some sense the technological orientation can claim to be the broadest of all, arching over the other four and offering resources to all of them.

That the five-part model is best understood as four parts purpose and one part means disturbs me somewhat simply because the concepts within the model are not parallel, making a strict equivalency among them difficult to argue. The lack of equivalency among the five conceptions was evident from the first; years of working with this model persuaded me that the discrepancy weakens the model's claims of providing a descriptive map of equal and mutually exclusive choices. It is one

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feature that any revision to the model must somehow address.

Setting aside the problem of the imbalance among the five categories, can they adequately describe curriculum discourse today? Changes in the public dialogue about education in the intervening years have brought many pressures to bear on the model, making it difficult to apply currently without numerous caveats and qualifiers. For example, the vast changes in technology in the past dozen years give more intense meaning to the technological conception and may also modify what is meant by the cognitive-process orientation. While computer-assisted instruction was a strong option in the early 1970s, its applications were chiefly to enhancing the learning of basic skills such as reading and math. Foreseen but not yet a reality at the same time was the advent of microcomputers and the changes they have wrought in the school curriculum.

Instruction in the use of computers is now available in most school districts and computer literacy is now mentioned as a basic cognitive skill needed by all children. It is a skill many of their parents lack, and as such it is a cognitive process qualitatively different from those on which that conception was built, processes most educated adults had mastered and needed to transmit to children.

The computer revolution has made the technological orientation stronger both as an educational means and as a new basic-skill end in itself. It narrows the gap somewhat between the technological and the other four conceptions by tying the mastery of a particular technology to the explicit goals of schooling. The technological revolution seems not yet to have peaked, and the technological perspective is now even harder for non-technologists to ignore.

Another major change that has redefined the model's applicability is the clear swing from the social activism of the 1960s, which colored much of the writing in the professional journals at the time, to the social conservatism of today. The rise of the "new right" and the growing strength of the fundamentalists' social agenda has shifted the popular meaning of social reconstructionism. Today the social reconstruction conception is clear but splintered, with a strong new wing arguing for a reconstruction of society along lines concerned with a religiously-based morality. The original social reconstructionists have taken a back seat in the public dialogue, overshadowed by conservative values that were rarely introduced into educational discourse

in the early 1970s, such as the restoration of prayer to the classroom and a renewed interest in censorship. The concept must be understood in these revised terms if it is to remain useful to understanding the domains of curriculum discourse. It is at least partly in these new terms that educational issues have figured prominently in recent elections.

Academic rationalism remains and seems likely to endure. Its practical translation into the subject-matter divisions of the school day continues to be updated by the introduction of classes on computer literacy, substance abuse education, and other survival skills, and by the continual revision of textbooks to incorporate new insights such as women's role in history. But the schools' commitment to teaching the traditions of the western intellectual heritage remains strong. Indeed, of all the original five conflicting conceptions, the one that has had the most deliberate resurgence in its original form has been academic rationalism, supported now by numerous national studies of schooling calling for a strengthening of liberal education in the K-12 curriculum. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) is a clear example.

The self-actualizing conception, emphasizing personal fulfillment and "a context in which individuals discover and develop their unique identities" (Eisner & Vallance, 1973, p. 105), reflected the free-school movement and other innovations of the 1960s educational climate. Social changes since then have had a more drastic impact on this conception than on any other, and indeed it is difficult now to claim that the self-actualizing conception is a dominant theme within the literature of curriculum. While alternative schools remain, they and the numerous religiously-based private schools that have mushroomed since then often have curricula best described in academic-rationalist or cognitive-process terms, highly concerned with traditional achievement and performance.

Of the five conflicting conceptions evident in the curriculum literature of a dozen years ago, the self-actualizing perspective has probably suffered the most, losing its saliency to the changes of a society that has become increasingly practical and job-oriented in its demands on the curriculum. To the extent that this conception argued a kind of morality of individualism and autonomy, it has effectively dropped out of the public discourse. It survives best in the gentler form of teachers' concern for the individuality of children and in the availability of individualized learning plans and self-paced instruction. It has mellowed, perhaps, and

gone underground to become one of several basic tenets held by good teachers, no longer claiming to be the sole purpose of education but accepted by most as a principle to be integrated with others.

Dropping "self-actualization" from the model, then, it remains to ask whether the remaining four conceptions of the curriculum still cover the full territory of curriculum discourse. The following section argues that they ignore two interesting conceptions of schooling. One describes an attitude toward schooling that has gained ascendancy in the intervening 12 years; the other is my own. Both pertain to the student's expectations of the curriculum and to the curricular choices guided by those conceptions, a perspective not treated directly in the original study.

Two New Conceptions

Evident especially at the college level, but finding its way into the K-12 curriculum as well, is a new—or at least recently clarified—emphasis on *personal success* as the goal of education. This change seems to parallel the decline in social activism and collective commitment that characterized the social reconstruction reformers of the late 1960s. It is exacerbated by rapidly changing technology, which seems to threaten to make much established knowledge obsolete, and by a troubled economy, where jobs are scarce and competition fierce.

In any event curriculum is seen as a means to an immediate practical end, a matter quite different from the more generalized subject-mastery or skills-acquisition arguments of the *Conflicting Conceptions* model. The astonishing increase in numbers of students majoring in business, computer science, and engineering, and the concomitant decline in enrollments in the humanities and social sciences, bespeaks an orientation to the curriculum that is not clearly accounted for in *Conflicting Conceptions*.

The personal success conception of curriculum is evident in discussions among faculty whose chief concern in curriculum reform is to enhance the job-placement prospects of their graduates. It is reflected in the course selections of students in highly competitive fields who may avoid the demanding electives for fear of threatening their grade-point averages. While personal success has always been a concern for both students and educators, its current salience as a guiding principle of curriculum design and course selection argues its separate status as one conception guiding curriculum discourse today. It may be that curriculum for personal success is a cyclical orientation, rising in times of

economic turmoil and perhaps alternating with the more traditional social-reconstruction perspective in times of relative abundance.

My own conception of curriculum has evolved out of a consideration of these and other perspectives on the problems of schooling. It is scarcely revolutionary, but as it is covered by none of the five original "conflicting conceptions" and certainly not by the curriculum-for-personal-success orientation that I would now append to that model, it merits some development here.

The conception I propose encompasses academic rationalism and the self-actualizing perspective. It is a conception of the curriculum that focuses not on the ultimate social benefits (though they could be substantial), nor on the particular intellectual skills it would impart (though they would be unavoidable), nor on the technology required to teach it (the application of technology would be incidental and not of concern for its own sake). Its outcomes would not be easily measurable, though certainly some of them could be subject to traditional forms of evaluation without violating the basic principles of the curriculum. It partakes of academic rationalism to the extent that it allows for and celebrates the intellectual territories of the traditional disciplines. It incorporates the self-actualization perspective to the extent that it celebrates the personal liberation that can come from understanding and appreciating the questions that the traditional disciplines ask—and from being able to synthesize them to appreciate a variety of modes of knowing.¹

The end result of a curriculum so conceived might not look notably different from many others. Students would still master content areas and cognitive skills, thanks to some curriculum planners' appropriate use of educational technology, and develop some commitments about social change and their role in that process. Yet this conception is not merely a synthesis of those outlined in *Conflicting Conceptions*. It focuses on a dimension of schooling that all five of them ignored, the conception of education that we may hope the student carries with him or her when formal schooling is finished. It sees the conception of curriculum as itself an end product of the curriculum, embodied in its graduates. It is the conception which sees the purpose of schooling as creating a *personal commitment to learning*. By this I mean something more fundamental than the willingness to continue coursework that, the overused phrase "lifelong learning" has come to imply. I mean instead an

underlying passion for the hard work and joys of intellectual exploration, whether it be in the humanities, mechanical engineering, nutrition science, or even curriculum theory.

While I support the return to the liberal arts that so many new studies are advocating, the current arguments for curriculum reform are phrased in terms curiously external to the realities of student, teacher, and classroom. A *Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) bases its arguments on an analysis of a crisis not necessarily in education but in symptoms such as declining test scores, international comparisons of student achievement, declining national economic strength, and other composites. This persuasive report argues for educational changes that it claims would redress these composite imbalances, yet it is concerned ultimately with restoring the strength of the nation. The proposed changes in education are argued in utilitarian terms.

Other signs pointing to a generally utilitarian view of schooling are the rise in practical majors among college students, already mentioned, and the changing demographics and economic realities which combine to create a growing pool of adult and part-time students at the college level. These older students, fitting in schooling between job and family commitments, have specific goals that are often job-related and only infrequently shaped by an interest in personal enrichment. Their selection of courses is guided by practical concerns.

There is also a curious impersonality to most of our arguments about schooling. We speak of students (including older students) in the aggregate, of national crises in the abstract, of declining test scores as a composite, and it is feasible to base educational arguments on these quite legitimate perceptions. What most of our conceptions of the curriculum too readily ignore is the personal, ethical impact educators make on individual students, and its implication for students' continued intellectual growth. Huebner (1966) argued this point nearly two decades ago when he observed that we normally allow the technical, political, and scientific value of educational change to override our concern for the aesthetic and ethical impact schooling makes on real lives.

It is in fact more difficult to talk about, much less to manipulate, the student's passion for learning, commitment to intellectual inquiry, sense of participation in the culture, or other such soft-headed concerns. Yet I suspect that the student's attitude toward learning—perhaps what Bereiter (1973) im-

plied by his concept of "personal learning"—may be the curriculum's most important, if most ephemeral, achievement. If a student's personal commitment to learning is to a large extent a byproduct of the ethical commitments made to that student by notable teachers and embodied in the curriculum itself, the conception of curriculum I argue for here would make that commitment a central and consistent concern.

It is easier to see the practical implications of this conception at the post-secondary level than at the K-12 level, simply because postsecondary students have a degree of freedom of choice that K-12 students lack. For example, a curriculum dedicated to fostering a fundamental commitment to learning might not allow students to select a major until the junior year. This does not also imply a general curriculum for all students. Rather, it argues for a period of guided exploration in a variety of fields free of the constraints of specialization in career-related fields of study.

This exploration could be within the traditional disciplines now demarcated by departmental boundaries or in the various "ways of knowing" argued in the *84th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Eisner, 1985). It might provide a system of guided study options that could meet elective requirements with individualized study projects stemming from interests sparked in introductory courses. It might encourage student involvement in out-of-class projects related to studies, such as lecture series, field trips, internships, or performing arts events, that would reinforce the real-life value of disciplines covered in these non-major years.

Such an exploration would allow for interdisciplinary course sequences designed to reduce the remoteness of intellectual questions—with problems of philosophy and ethics, for example, addressed by engineers, physicians, city planners, and social workers. It might encourage students to spend occasional intersession periods pursuing not five courses but one or two in depth, sheerly for the experience of exploring one set of intellectual problems unencumbered by other demands.

The specific content of the curriculum is important and much thought would need to be given to the bases for content divisions and organization. Ultimately, however, the specific content is no more crucial than the spirit in which the student approaches (and is supported in) the process of learning.

This conception of curriculum demands teachers who are passionate about their own disciplines and eager to convey their enthusiasm to students. It demands teachers for whom scholarship is a continually exciting and rewarding adventure, and whose love of the discovery and structure of knowledge can help students accept the necessary difficulty of learning it.

To argue for such a conception of the curriculum is not to say that it does not already exist. Portions of this ideal exist on most campuses and in any good school, and teachers know they have succeeded in these terms when their students return to say so. The best teachers and the most sensitive curriculum planners can shape educational experiences that in turn shape students' personal commitment to learning. But often the evidence of success is a long time in coming—a student may not realize the strength of a particular teacher's influence until many years later—and difficult to specify in advance. How then can this conception of the curriculum be applied in advance, rather than only appreciated after the fact?

Much of the research necessary for addressing this question must be in an area that curriculum specialists normally leave to others. Teacher training and the appropriate selection of teachers are matters that will most affect the viability of this conception of the curriculum. We must be concerned with the curriculum of teachers as they move through their preservice training and their inservice refresher work in later years. Research questions that come to mind include: (a) What is the appropriate balance between subject-area mastery and teaching-methods mastery for new teachers? Would a requirement that all teachers have a four-year degree in some traditional discipline before acquiring teaching credentials have a discernible effect on teachers' confidence in, and enthusiasm for, the disciplines they teach? (b) Ought teachers' college curriculum electives to be somehow different from those of students entering more technical fields? If so, how? Assuming that a passion for learning is a prerequisite for effectively teaching a curriculum for personal commitment, how can the curriculum of teachers help to instill this in them? And how do we retain such students in the teaching field? (c) What aptitudes and predispositions best select students into the teaching profession? Relatively how important are, for example, liking children and being enthusiastic about a particular subject area? (d) How are teaching methods best taught? By courses so labeled? By practicum experiences with

gifted teachers in real classrooms? Are both necessary? (e) What kinds of inservice training experiences are most valuable to teachers at varying levels of experience? Is there a difference in the relative value of "methods" courses and advanced work in content areas as teachers become more experienced in the classroom setting? Do excellent teachers benefit more by one approach than by another?

A concluding comment I must make about this conception of the curriculum is simply that it is a conception most of us have experienced at least once. Most of us have had at least one teacher who sparked an interest in working harder, whose enthusiasm for the subject was infectious and memorable even to students whose later choices took them in other directions. In my own case, I remember especially a famous old anthropology professor who lectured from yellowed notes to a sea of 400 anonymous undergraduates but who was clearly enthralled with his subject, and an art history professor whose brilliant lecture one evening on the development of the flying buttress in gothic cathedrals was an unforgettable synthesis of theological and engineering arguments and evidence. Most of us in education know what it is to be committed to education for its own sake; a kind of missionary zeal keeps this profession going against the odds periodically stacked against it. It is the commitment to the sheer excitement of learning that describes this conception of curriculum—a commitment not quite covered by any of the five conflicting conceptions with which this analysis began.

Conclusion

In some ways the curriculum for personal commitment is the complement of the other now-salient conception of curriculum overlooked by the original five-part model. Ultimately we can hope that a curriculum shaped by a concern for a personal commitment to learning might yield some of the same practical results as a curriculum oriented toward immediate personal success. Both respond to a concern for students' individual futures and to students' ability to control their futures. Neither variation on this theme of deliberate educational choices for personal growth is clearly admitted by the model offered in *Conflicting Conceptions*. It would be appropriate to include both perspectives as legitimate conceptions of the curriculum guiding educational discourse today. Perhaps another dozen years will reveal which of the two has most endured, and

what the conflicting conceptions of schooling of that era will be.

Note

1. For a full explication of this concept, see Eisner (1985).

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M. Frances Klein

Alternative Curriculum Conceptions and Designs

The field of curriculum is not without its critics. Schwab (1978) has called the study of curriculum moribund and Jackson (1981) has even questioned the existence of curriculum as a field of study. Most curriculum scholars, however, are more confident about the existence of the curriculum field since they have spent their careers in an effort to conceptualize it and study those practices which are called curriculum. Although some scholars may debate whether curriculum studies exist and if so, how to conceptualize them, few practitioners would question the existence or importance of curriculum. Curriculum is the substance of schooling—the primary reason why people attend school.

Many educational resources go to direct and support the curriculum. Countless committee meetings are held to develop it; teachers are hired, trained, and supervised in order to implement it; administrators are exhorted to provide curriculum leadership as their primary role; materials are purchased or created; learning resource centers are built to support the curriculum; and educational researchers seek bases for improving it.

In the comparatively short time since its generally recognized "birth" with the publication of Bobbitt's book, *The Curriculum* (1918), the growth of the field has been slow and difficult. Curriculum scholars have debated significant ideas and proposed changes, but have not always addressed themselves to what difference their ideas make to the practitioner. Little wonder, then, that the prac-

tice of curriculum continues along a single strand of development with few alternative ideas considered.

Tyler's syllabus, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1950), was selected by the honorary group, Professors of Curriculum, as one of two publications which has had the most influence over the field of curriculum (Shane, 1981).¹ In the Tyler syllabus, concepts and procedures are spelled out as a way to view curriculum and they have been applied in diverse situations all over the world in curriculum development efforts. Some curriculum scholars owe their careers to their refinements and modifications of the Tyler rationale.

Tyler identified three data sources which must be used in curriculum development: society, student, and subject matter. These three data sources have historically stimulated alternative conceptions of curriculum and the development of different curriculum designs. Scholars have long recognized the importance of the three data sources, but too often missed Tyler's message—that the use of one of the data sources alone is inadequate in developing curricula. A comprehensive curriculum must use all three.

Current curriculum practice and research focus almost exclusively on just one of these data sources, subject matter. Curricula have been developed using what Eisner and Vallance (1974) call the technological conception. Referred to here as the measured curriculum, it has emerged into dominance over all other alternative conceptions and designs.

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